

5 Films that Helped Me Get Where I Am Today

Growing up in the football-obsessed American South, the arts haven't always been a top priority. But even as the creative arts have been background players, film and television have been essential parts of the region's amazing yet troubling history.

As a writer and animation enthusiasts, storytelling and characters have a special place in my creative heart. The 1990's Disney Renaissance is still the best age for animated films for me as many of the films from that period (Disney or not) still hold up to this day. But because I am a videophile, there are some live-action films that are tied to my love of storytelling as well.

So, sit back and relax as with this trip down memory lane as I share the five films that helped me get where I am today.



The Prince of Egypt (1998)

This animated take on The Ten Commandments is one-part biblical epic, one-part Broadway musical and one-part Sunday Bible school. The combination of great storytelling, complex themes, stellar animation, an all-star voice cast and inspiring music numbers helped a then-new DreamWorks take on the titan known as Disney with great success. Plus, it happens to be the only time vocal titans Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey collaborated on the film's award-winning theme "When You Believe."



Steel Magnolias (1989)

This melodrama classic manages to mix humor and intense dramatics in a way that could almost be over-the-top but stays subtle due to the performances of the lead female ensemble. Everything from the discussion of “Pepto-Bismol” pink to Shelby’s tragic end allows for the storytelling to be authentic to the circumstances in the film. Seeing a film with an ensemble of strong female characters is still a rarity, but when it’s done right, the results are pure magic.



The Secret of NIMH (1982)

This adaptation of the Newbery Medal-winning *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* manages to take dark themes and make them digestible for young audiences. The storytelling mixes fantasy, science fiction and adventure in a way that no other animated film has been able to replicate it. The gorgeous detail of the animation along with an amazing voice cast allows the film to be a work of art rather than just another animated children's film.



Coming to America (1988)

In what is considered one of Eddie Murphy's best films, this fish-out-water tale is pure comedy gold from beginning to end with outstanding performances from Eddie Murphy, James Earl Jones and Arsenio Hall. Seeing Murphy and Hall handle multiple characters throughout the film is a masterclass of character acting. The story manages to mix a sense of comedy, coming-of-age and romance that shows a side of Murphy audience rarely ever see.



The Lion King (1994)

Even if this Disney classic is a rip-off of Kimba the Lion, it is still a classic in every way. This animated coming-of-age musical epic makes Shakespeare's Hamlet more digestible for the Disney crowd. The film manages to weave elegant, layered storytelling with gorgeous design and hybrid animation allowing both children and adults to enjoy. The African-influenced Elton John soundtrack and spot-on voice casting add to the overall grandiose nature of the film. Having classic award-winning songs like "Circle of Life," "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" and "Hakuna Matata" just sweetens the deal.

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My eclectic taste in film has shaped the way I approach screenwriting and all its nuances. Hopefully, my work one day will be on the same level as these films.